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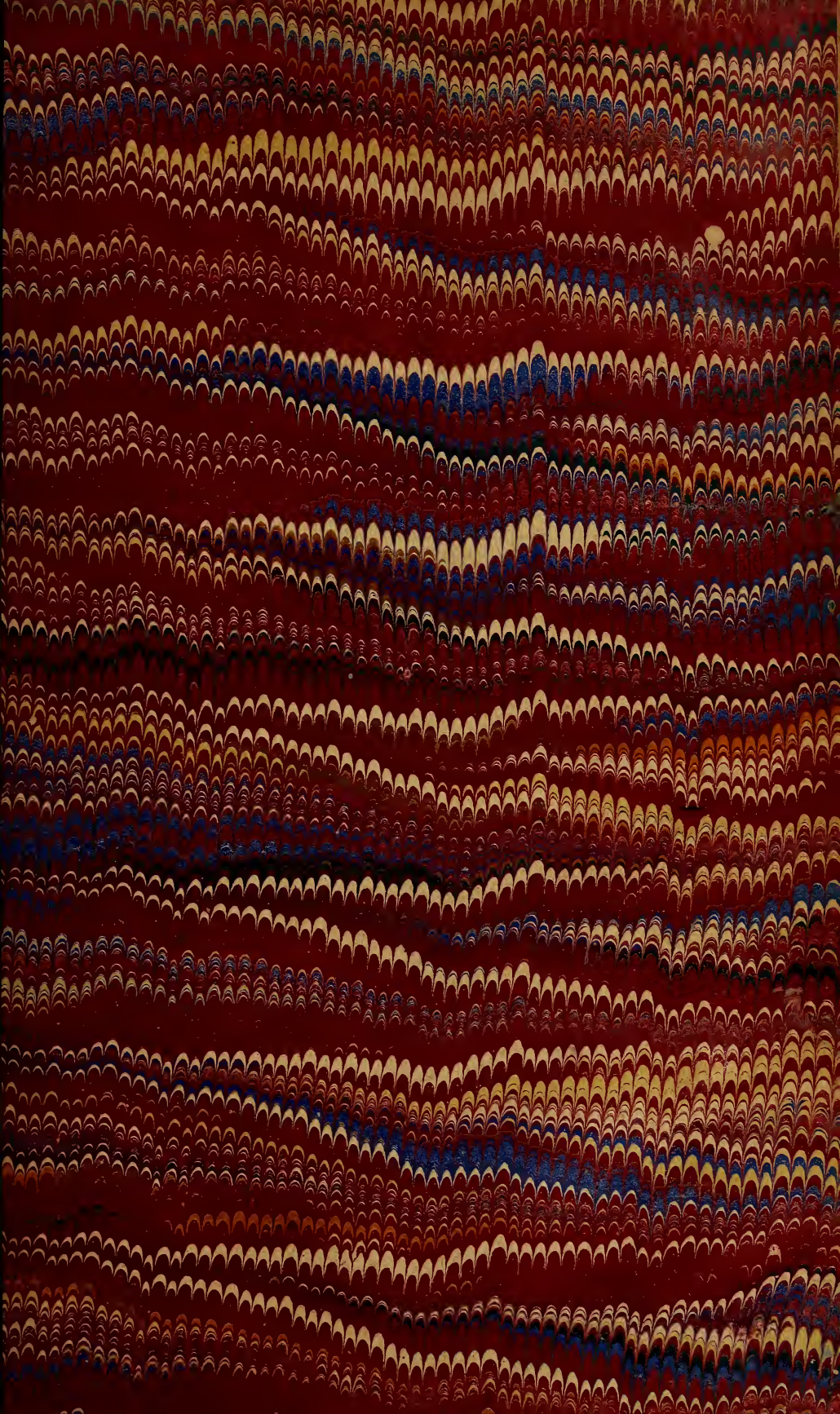
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



AN
INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEWTON THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTION,

JUNE 28, 1854.

BY

REV. ALVAH HOVEY,

Professor of Church History.

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A D D R E S S .

HERETOFORE the officers of this Institution have been wont, when elected, to enter upon the performance of their duties without the formality of a public address. In deviating from this course, sanctioned by usage, and altogether congenial to my feelings, I act in deference to the opinion of others, and from a conviction that the department of Christian study to which I am called, has not been fully and generally appreciated by us. Veneration, by no means too high or sincere, for the Scriptures and the Apostolic Church, has led us, it may be feared, to undervalue and in some measure neglect the record of what Christianity has wrought in the world during the lapse of these eighteen centuries. My discourse will therefore be expected to treat of this great record ; and the particular points which I propose to discuss, are the *character and value of a good history of our holy religion*, from the death of Paul to the present time. For thus may be indicated with least obtrusiveness the aim and the importance of instruction in the department entrusted to my care.

And as to the character of such a history, it may be said in general, that it must give a trustworthy account of the progress and influence of Christianity among men.

It must reproduce before the mind those scenes of trial, conflict and victory, by which, in defiance of all enemies, the truth has been preserved and "the household of faith" continued from age to age; by which the friends of Christ have been made pure and strong and joyful in the midst of restless foes and seductive temptations. It must recall and reënact, by the power of graphic language, the successive campaigns of this grand warfare and bring to light the Christian forces which have been most efficient when set against "principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places." It must extract from the dead languages of the faded manuscript, from the rusty coin and the huge mediæval folio, words of energy and light, to animate the drooping and inspire the studious mind. It must break the crust which has hardened over those old fountains of knowledge, and let the waters of truth gush out in various and refreshing streams. It must also guide those liberated currents into appropriate channels, as the Egyptian gardener, with skilful hand, turns the obedient rivulets whithersoever he will to water his thirsty plants. In other words, it must draw from the original sources of knowledge respecting the Church, in each separate period of her history, suitable and interesting facts, and then grouping them together with the eye of genius, form a series of truthful portraits, giving at once the permanent and the varying features of this Church.

To be more specific, we believe that such a history must be extracted substantially from original documents. Though not in words, it must be in thought and spirit a transcript from the testimony of first witnesses and make the same impression, weariness excepted, upon a discerning mind, which would have been made by the perusal

of their testimony in full. For history does not move in the domain of fiction, but in that of fact. It has to do with actual events, with the endurances and achievements and opinions of a real, not a Utopian Commonwealth. It should be, no doubt, a sublime epic, reciting the deeds of Immanuel with His host, and doing far more than Milton's "great argument" to

"Assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men."

It is called to celebrate feats of moral heroism nobler than imagination ever feigned, and to recount events ordained of God for the accomplishment of His high designs. But it must cling to the truth. It must introduce no phantom upon the battle-fields of this holy warfare, no shadowy form to mingle with earnest combatants in the army of Christ. It must be careful not to make the oracle of divine Providence either ambiguous or false, not to "extenuate, or set down aught in malice." Professing to let the voices of the Past be heard afresh, and pour their wisdom into the hearts of living men, it may err as fatally by the omission of that which is important as by the fabrication of that which never occurred. But no analysis or summary or report of testimony can be so reliable as the unabridged testimony itself. For a slight error, admitted through prejudice or oversight by an investigator of the original evidence, is liable to increase in magnitude and assurance when repeated by another;—"mobilitate viget, viresque acquirit eundo." The second reporter is not checked by those countervailing facts which tempered the language of the first, and rendered it impossible for him to deviate unconsciously so far from the truth. Accordingly whatever labor it

may cost, a good history of the Church must be founded, like the verdict of an enlightened jury, upon the earliest and most direct evidence. Otherwise, moreover, it will be deficient in clearness, precision and vivacity of style. It may, indeed, display these excellencies, though resting upon derived testimony, but only at the sacrifice of trustworthiness, a far more essential quality. For if merely such facts are admitted as are considered authentic, and reported alike by a large majority of those who have examined the primitive sources, the narrative will seem cold and bald and unattractive. No reader will be greatly interested. The scenes of other days will not rise up before his mind ; the moral atmosphere of the past will not surround or enter his spirit. He will traverse a barren waste, with but here and there a pile of whitened bones or a solitary mound to attract his attention. If, on the other hand, that which is omitted, or called in question, or variously stated, by investigators of the original documents, be freely received, the work becomes thereby unworthy of confidence. However attractive, it forfeits the character of reliable history, and assumes that of mingled fiction and fact.

Without pausing to justify this proposition by further argument, we add, in the second place, that a correct view of Christianity itself must underlie and pervade every good history of the Church. This normal idea will give unity, coherence, meaning and interest to details otherwise impertinent and wearisome. It will effectually prevent the intrusion of thoughts or facts alien to the subject, and like the force of attraction, will seize and hold with the strongest grasp that which possesses the greatest affinity to it. Wisely to choose his materials constitutes half the merit of an able historian. Even

where all the facts spread out before his mind appear self-consistent and reliable, a selection must be made ; many must be examined, but few admitted.

It was unnecessary for the Evangelists to put on record all the words of Christ in order to give us a true conception of His spirit and work. The immense labor of preparing so minute and exhaustive an account would have been worse than lost. For if by the special providence of God the endless narrative had been saved from destruction, few persons would have been able to obtain or peruse it, and still fewer would have made any considerable use of more than a fraction of its contents. Hence the wisdom of God is manifest in the brevity of the Gospels, even without urging the presumption, that a fuller record would have merely reënforced, in other language addressed to other hearers, the same fundamental truths which we now have.

But if the Evangelists were compelled to omit a large part of our Saviour's words, every one of which they esteemed an oracle from heaven, lest their narrations should be unduly protracted ; it is quite certain that a still larger proportion of existing materials must be rejected by a historian of the Church. For the facts here craving attention are beyond comparison more numerous and of less intrinsic value. Every earnest historian, therefore, remitted to his own judgment or taste in the choice of all the minor events to be noticed, will be guided in this delicate part of his work mainly by the idea which he has formed of Christianity in its normal state. This idea will also organize his chosen materials, placing one historical personage in the fore-ground, and another in the back-ground, letting a beam of light fall upon this occurrence and a dim shadow upon that, sketch-

ing with patient love the features of an approved doctrine, but giving in sharp outline the skeleton of a creed which he firmly believes to be unchristian and pernicious. Meanwhile the writer knows himself to be upright, and believes himself to be impartial. His sole purpose and effort are to represent the Church of Christ in all the stages of its growth and activity. Provided, then, he understands the nature of that church, and is able to distinguish it readily from every counterfeit, all is well. But an error at this point vitiates the whole performance ; a misconception in regard to the real characteristics or constitutive elements of that kingdom, whose history he professes to relate, must greatly mar the excellence of his work.

A genuine Romanist, who believes the invisible church on earth is all contained within the visible, and who excludes from the latter those of every name who do not submit to the Pope, and recognize his primacy in spiritual concerns, can hardly with a good conscience notice Protestants of any age, save in the language of anathema. A fatal prejudgment separates them, as by a wall of ice, from his sympathy ; denies them, with the sternness of an infallible decision, any place or part among the faithful, and requires him to pass them by in silence on the other side, or call attention with the finger of warning and accents of horror to their sad apostacy.

But on the other hand, whoever believes that Christianity is preëminently spiritual and internal, a divine life and power, transforming the individual soul, and dependent for its birth and growth upon no particular ritual or sacrament, or human priesthood ; whoever believes, with Neander, that this new creation within may reveal itself with equal clearness through many and

diverse organizations adapted to the wants of each period and people, will produce a far other and more comprehensive history of the Church. He will find true wisdom in the cavern and white-robed innocence in the dungeon, springs of water in the desert and flowers of piety on the Alpine summit. The stroke of his pen, like the touch of Ithuriel's spear, will change many a heretic into a martyr, and many a caricature into a likeness; will restore multitudes to their proper size and station in the religious world, and give to living faith and love the place which is often assumed by empty form and disguised hypocrisy.

Still, another historian may be convinced that Christianity is first personal, and then organic—first a new life in the individual soul, and then a representation of that life in fellowship with others; that it neither descends by inheritance, like an heir-loom, from generation to generation, nor is conveyed as balm into the heart by holy offices and solemn rites, that it must rather be traced directly to the spirit of God and the word of truth, and hence may exist notwithstanding many changes in the polity and ritual of the church as planted by the Apostles; and yet with equal firmness may believe, that our Saviour cared for the order of His house, and in due time, by the agency of inspired men, formed the primitive converts of each city or district into a model family; that every departure from this original and fraternal organization of believers is dangerous to piety, and every attempt to improve it rash and seditious—like an attempt to improve the word of God—tending either to secularize or to paganize the religion of Christ; he may believe that the whole process of boasted development in the constitution of the Church,

since the first age, has been revolutionary and injurious, and all her sacramental and liturgical growth imaginary—like modern advances upon the personal excellence of Christ—or unnatural, obliterating more and more those characteristics of true religion which were adduced by Tertullian as manifestly divine, namely, the remarkable simplicity of its rites and the inexpressible grandeur of its effects. Now to the eye of such an author, that stream of living water, issuing “from the fountain opened in Judah,” must appear to separate at length, like the river of Eden, and flow on in many divergent channels;—one of them sweeping heavily down through the valley, and receiving from either hand a multitude of turbid affluents, to swell its volume and vitiate its purity and destroy its healing virtue,—while others, winding their way along the hill-sides, amid rocks and trees, retain their sweetness, and sparkle with transparent life under every little patch of sky and every beam of historic light to which they are exposed. Such a historian would gladly lift the veil, whether of silence or slander, from all of every name, who in their day “fought a good fight and kept the faith.” He would commemorate with peculiar satisfaction the deeds of those who braved death rather than swerve from the truth. And by a proper arrangement he would suffer the events of history to utter their emphatic protest against any deviation, however slight, from apostolic doctrine or practice. Oftentimes have these events failed to do this, simply because writers, in the course of their narrative, have given to them the color of their own false opinions, just as rocks are said to impart their color to the clinging polypus.

The instances now alleged show how greatly his own

idea of Christianity must control a historian in the choice and use of his materials, and establish our proposition that a correct view of the Church as to its chief elements must underlie every good history of it. The warmth of honest zeal can be no substitute for this view, for zeal, however sincere, if not according to knowledge, may but clothe the form of error in robes of brighter hue, and twist the face of truth awry with a more steady and relentless hand ; it may call evil good, and good evil, with the strong emphasis of real conviction, and this conviction is a thing so fair and noble in itself, as to hide, perchance, the ugliness of deformity and make the worse appear the better reason. Nor can the cold equity arrogated to themselves by such as profess to study and write, without the bias of any foregone conclusion as to the nature of Christianity, prove a better substitute for this view. To keep one's mind in perfect suspense touching so great a matter, is clearly impossible ; but were it not,—were this ignorant equipoise of judgment, resting on a sublime indifference to all which speaks of God and eternity, actually maintained by an ecclesiastical historian, how then could he distinguish the genuine from the spurious ? How could he discover and honor the true ship of the Church amid fleets of piratical craft sailing under her colors ?

But whence shall a right conception of the Church be obtained ? From the New Testament, and from that alone. If, then, as we humbly venture to believe, Christians of our denomination have turned to this sun for light, and have received substantially correct impressions respecting the faith and order of God's house, they possess at least one qualification for the profitable study and truthful delineation of its history.

And further, special prominence must be given in such a history to questions which still agitate the Church. It must be penetrated throughout by spiritual earnestness, and seek to elucidate the real problems of religion and life. For these are of permanent and transcendent interest. They embrace every thing of supreme importance to the soul. Having claimed the deepest thought of spiritual men from the first, by their weight or mystery, they articulate and conjoin the past with the present, and exhibit the most absorbing religious investigations of each successive period in the Church, as belonging to the identical web of Christian life or discipline which men of God are now weaving. They are the strong, benignant angels, with whom, by the wise providence of God, the faithful have ever been called anew to wrestle. Hence they must occupy a conspicuous place in every well-executed history of our religion.

Whatever benefit may accrue to science, philosophy, and literature, from the prevalence of Christianity, its primary mission is to the moral nature of man. Its chief purpose and work are to deliver the soul from guilt, and crown it with eternal life. It may, indeed, have taken heavy chains from the intellect, and strengthened it for flight into higher realms of scientific investigation ; it may have irradiated large spaces of the soul, which were dark as midnight before, and brought to view sources of good or evil, after which mental explorers had groped in vain ; it may have established the only perfect law of beneficence, and suggested to philanthropy her best modes of action ; it may have invigorated the reason, raised the imagination and refined the taste of authors, thus enlarging the channels and purifying the waters of literature ; and all this may deserve brief

notice and delineation in a history of Christianity ; an account of all this may be infused into the pores of the body of the work, adding to its value, without augmenting its bulk ;—but the principal object for which the Word was made flesh, and suffered upon Calvary, and the principal office assigned to His Gospel and His kingdom, were unquestionably to fulfil the counsel of Infinite Love, “that whosoever believeth might not perish, but have everlasting life.”

And from the days of Paul until now, the true servants of God have recognized this peculiarity of the Gospel, have thought more of its saving than of its civilizing power, have rather been anxious to ascertain the moral attitude of man towards his Maker, and the appointed means of reconciliation, than to learn the effect which their religion has upon the temporal interests of society. They have acknowledged no doctrines of theology or polity to be cardinal, except those which go to answer that tremendous question : “What shall we do to be saved ?” And therefore must these doctrines, traceable in every age of the Church, be employed as the unbroken and continuous warp of her history. For the language of the wise man is ever true : “As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.” Through all time the general make and strength of human spirits abide unchanged. In the search after truth much the same path is trodden by the mind of father and son. “The thing that hath been is the thing that shall be.” Theologians of to-day are working the old veins of thought, and but casting into fresher and more approved forms gold, or silver, or brass, taken from mines opened long ago by the primitive explorer.

Nor do we by this language depreciate the labors of

any. Even Christ himself chose for the most part to reassert known principles of virtue. His moral precepts had been nearly all anticipated. Whether this pre-announcement of them, to a considerable extent, by heathen sages, was owing to somewhat religious in the structure of man's soul, causing it to light upon them in its lucid moments, or to a touch of inspiration, a breath from the Spirit, granted in mercy to thoughtful, earnest pagans, or, as we imagine, to some dim tradition and echo of early messages from God, may be doubtful ; but of their presence, here and there, in the masses of classical literature, like solitary kernels of wheat in huge mountains of chaff, there can be no doubt. And the Messiah's chief work as an ethical teacher, was to unite the dissevered members of truth into a living body,—to present, in a compact, homogeneous system, those expressions of the divine law of right and benevolence, which had before existed only in a fragmentary state, remote from each other, and almost lost under the rubbish of human speculation.

But if Christ was content to reassert old principles, because they were true and supremely important, it cannot be thought strange that Christians do the same ; it cannot be deemed surprising that nearly all the mighty thinkers and doers in the Church, nearly all believers characterized by downright honesty of purpose and energy of action, have been irresistibly drawn to a few central, cardinal doctrines of the faith, and that a record of their struggles from age to age, while endeavoring to appropriate more fully, and use more efficiently these great powers, may constitute the best and vital part of a good history.

As doctrines of this class, may be specified those which

pertain to the nature of God's law, the moral state of our race, the person and work of Christ, and the way to holiness in Him,—to the examination of which serious men have ever been attracted by their infinite weight. From the beginning, genuine Christians have wished to know and defend the truth in relation to these matters ; and so, too, have the foes of Christ striven with desperate rivalry to pervert or bedim this truth. In every adequate record, therefore, of what Christianity has been and has done, these principles must continually appear. The earnestness and vigor with which men have often met around them in spiritual conflict, must animate the narrative, and make it well nigh tremble with emotion, as air trembles under the glowing sunbeam.

Yet it is by no means enough thus to recognize topics of enduring interest, and give them large space in the account. They must also be treated with discrimination. Studious attention must be paid to the relative importance of each for the several periods of history. For in every distinct era of her existence, has the Church been compelled to undertake some leading, urgent task. By a wise foresight and arrangement of God the vital problems of Christian doctrine have come up in turn for investigation ; as the humanity of Christ in one age and His divinity in another, now the moral constitution of man, and then the nature of the atonement, here the use of ordinances, and there the potency of faith ; and thus every period has had its own high lesson to teach, and its own deep impression to make. A failure to comprehend these characteristic lessons, and to imprint them on the pages of his book, must be fatal to the success of any historian.

Still more fatal, however, must be the error of intro-

ducing, to any great extent, that which belongs exclusively to the past, and has no representative or counterpart in the land of the living. Questions, which long ago lost their hold on the general mind, merit only a rapid survey. Gratifying a mere antiquarian curiosity in religion, they pertain rather to the history of mental science than to that of Christianity. We must look upon many speculations of the early Church as we look upon the fossil remains of extinct races in the animal kingdom. They lie before us cold and motionless, the relics of an age and condition of the spiritual world, which have passed away, never more to return. Several opinions, vigorously advocated by scholastic writers in the middle ages, now exist merely as rigid petrifications, which no eloquence of speech can resuscitate. They were shoots from the philosophic willow grafted into the Christian vine; and while the vine still remains, deeply rooted and perennial, those adventitious shoots have flourished into sterile branches, and been cut off forever. And so the historian can give them no conspicuous place in his work. He must leave them to rest undisturbed, or else must insert them in whatever crevices lie between his larger and better materials, just as the skilful stone-layer drops many a bit and fragment into the chinks of his rising wall. Nor will such treatment necessarily deprive the reader of some adequate knowledge of their peculiarities. For the language of Irenæus is still a proverb : *Non oportet, universum ebibere mare eum, qui velit discere, quod aqua ejus salsa est.* "One need not drink the whole ocean to learn that its waters are salt."

We may close this part of our subject by remarking, that excellence of style must also characterize a good history of the Church. It must not merely contain the

truth, but display it. Events must neither be hidden by cumbrous phraseology, nor outshone by splendor of diction. A glimpse of them will not attract or satisfy; they must be made to stand forth full, and clear, and lifelike. Words in this case should serve, not to intercept one's vision of great transactions, but to clothe them instead as with a robe of "filmy gauze," and solicit a reader's eye to look upon the reality again. He may then be made to follow with intense sympathy the church militant, and in spirit "fight all her battles o'er again." If history be thus written,—if the facts are wisely chosen, grouped, and set in strong, terse, graphic language,—no species of human composition can be more interesting or instructive. *Loquitur in stilo . . . littera omni ore vocalior*.* "The author's pen will speak, and his written word be more effective than any eloquence of tongue."

Provided my attempt to describe a good history of the Church has been at all successful, we are now prepared to consider the value of such a history. And the presumption is altogether in its favor. For "God is in history," and especially in the history of His people. His presence is their "cloud by day and pillar of fire by night." His favor is their life, and His benediction their pledge of victory. The story of their achievements is the record of what God has wrought. And next to the infallible Word, this record brings us nearest the Holy One, and points out most distinctly His way among men.

It shows, in the first place, that God has done great things for the world by our holy religion. Whoever

* Tertullian,

would appreciate the Church of Christ as a factor in the history of mankind, let him obtain at the outset correct views of the world when this factor was introduced. Let him go back in spirit to the age of Tiberius Cæsar, and look into the houses and palaces, the schools and courts of justice, the temples and theatres, the camps and prisons of a people, who did “not like to retain God in their knowledge,” and were therefore “given over to a reprobate mind.” Let him hear the deep wail of Tacitus over the degeneracy of Rome, and listen to the awful confession of Seneca respecting the vices of his time ; let him study the satires of Juvenal, and ponder the words of Ovid, Suetonius and Dion, so illustrative of a sinking world. Let him examine in detail the writings of that period, till he feels in his deepest soul the utter impotence of philosophy and science and art to save men from the vilest passions and the lowest infamy. For we must know the original depth as well as the present height of an object, in order to measure the distance which it has passed over in the ascent. And hence, to see the ripe fruit of paganism ;—her sages drifting away on a sea of doubt ; her moralists feeling in blind desperation after the pillars of right ; her temples polluted by nameless and multiplied crimes ; her princes reckless, and her populace abject ; her simplicity and earnestness and manhood clean gone forever :—And then to look upon Israel, old and peevish ; her gold dim and her sceptre departed ; her sanctuary a den of thieves, and her teachers blind ; her law buried under the rubbish of tradition, and her charity more contracted than her boundaries,—to see that “darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people,” and to hear ever and anon voices of despair publishing the woe : this, alas ! must be the in-

troduction to his study. The earth was then a broad plain, on which rested a cold, dark mist. Scarce a hill-top pierced this veil of fog and gloom to the sunlight above. Scarce a solitary pilgrim could be discovered here and there climbing upward to catch a gleam of the cheerful day.

But now, in man's extremest need, the Word was made flesh : He " who was the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person," took the form of a servant, and walked lowly and gently among men. His feet were upon earth, but his head was above the mist and above the cloud, radiant with the glory of heaven. All spiritual wisdom was concentrated in Him, and superstition fled before His luminous teaching. He knew all the tones and semitones of the scale of truth, and all the divine harmonies ever to be evolved from them. He could touch at once every string of the golden harp of wisdom, and elicit gushing strains of melody and life. Yet mindful of human weakness, He but linked together in a few simple airs of " majestic sweetness " the fundamental chords of holy science, and reserved the more intricate and difficult combinations for another world.

A little company of disciples were drawn to His feet, listened to His sacred voice, opened their eyes to His divine effulgence, and sprang upward from darkness to day. And at length, after the Master had ascended on high, and the Holy Spirit had come down to inspire their minds with supernatural insight and prevailing faith, they were qualified to plant and train the Church of Christ, and were enabled to put on record for later generations all necessary truth. At their departure inspiration ceased. The well of salvation was large, deep, full,

and men were henceforth invited to draw and be refreshed. The facts or elements of Christian truth were given for all time.

But only an infinite mind could fully comprehend these elements. They were, however, to be used by men, faithful indeed, but not profound, by men nurtured in the midst of paganism, and breathing its tainted atmosphere, accustomed to moral twilight, and half bound by false philosophies. And so the Word of God was imperfectly understood,—the line of investigation floating awhile on the surface of truth. Many errors crept into the Church through the gate of bad interpretation. A nimble, untamed fancy, which exulted in allegory, parable and paradox, was suffered to explain the Bible according to its own license in the use of speech. Whole cosmogonies from the East were bound, like the burden of Bunyan's pilgrim, to a few passages of Scripture, and thus brought within the fold. Regeneration was at length taken to be a mere *opus operatum*, a change effected by the virtue of baptismal waters. The clergy in certain places became powerful, and began to say, each to his brother, "Stand by thyself, for I am holier than thou." They grew more tenacious of authority and less watchful for souls. Meanwhile kings undertook to patronize the faith which they once strove to quench in blood. They waxed zealous for their own several orthodoxy. They set up one and cast down another in the visible Church. They took part in general councils, and facilitated the settlement of theological questions by promptly adding to the gravity of argument the weight of a drawn sword. Pagan temples, and shrines, and festivals, and rites, were now consecrated afresh, and

solemnly appropriated for holy use by a secularized Christianity. Rome subdued her conquerers !

But let us not be too fast. There were seven lamps on the golden candlestick, and we may have watched but one of them. The eclipse of nominal Christianity may yet be merely annular. There may be a rim of light still clear and warm, upon the outer circle of the orb, a "silver margin to the cloud" which has grown so black. And it is even so. Christ did not suffer his word to fail. There were many then living and toiling, of whom the world was not worthy. There were communities little observed by the great and wise, who nevertheless kept the faith. There were unpretending believers, cast out as evil and laden with curses by the dominant hierarchy, who never ceased to make cave, glen and mountain height vocal with praise to God. And these were the true succession. By meekness, endurance and charity, by the "work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope," they verified their priestly lineage and calling. With an open Bible and a new heart, they refused to amalgamate with paganism, even when their refusal entailed the loss of all things, the giving of their bodies to be burned and of their memory to reproach.

But these were not all. Some in the papal church turned with fainting spirit to the Word of God, and drank long and deep of its crystal waters. Refreshed and invigorated, they began to labor also for others. Whole sections of the Church wavered in attachment to the see of Rome, and were hardly retained in her orbit by sword and fagot. Men of strong intellect, liberal culture and genuine faith, like Augustine and Pascal, took up the massive links of truth given by inspiration,

and welded them into mighty chains, binding the soul to free grace for salvation, and breaking down by their ponderous weight the arrogance of human pride and self-sufficiency. As the work went on, better principles of interpretation were adopted, reformation came, preaching was resumed, Bibles were multiplied, and now truth is entering into actual and earnest conflict with systems of error all over the world. And this truth is the great iconoclastic hammer of God Almighty, falling evermore, stroke after stroke, with increasing frequency and force, upon the stony head of idolatry ; a head, terribly jarred and splintered already, which that hammer shall at length beat in pieces and crush to dust and destroy utterly, that Christ may “reign from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.”

And by comparing the world of to-day with the world at Christ's advent, it will appear that God has done marvellous things for it by our holy religion. Homes and schools, prisons and asylums, churches and benevolent associations, all bear witness to a vast increase of knowledge and a partial renovation of society. A historical survey of the true Church will show that her members have been all along a brotherhood of spiritual noblemen, the best blood of our race, rejoicing in the hope of eternal life, and contending manfully for the faith once delivered to the saints.

And if, after such a survey, religion should still seem to have made slow advances, and done very little for so long a period, let us remember that “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” He is often pleased to elaborate, by means of varied instruments and through slowly moving centuries, those works which are in a signal manner to show

forth His power and benevolence. And He will never be straitened for time to carry fitly onward to its final issue the plan of mercy devised before the foundation of the world. Although we live in the "last days," we have nevertheless seen "only the beginning of the end." Christianity has gathered in merely the first sheaf of her rich and glorious harvest. Enough, however, has been done to prove her divine parentage, and the presence of God in her tents. Enough has been done to make her history, fairly written, the most instructive, admonitory and encouraging volume, apart from the Bible, which men can be invited to read.

Such a history possesses great value, in the second place, because it reveals the actual law of progress in Christianity. It is something to know that the cause of God has not been stationary since the close of the Apostolic era, that there has been a constant ebb or flow of tide in the spiritual world, a movement perpetual, and on the whole, progressive. It is something for a thoughtful Christian to find such words as "the righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger," applicable, not only to the individual believer, but to the entire body of Christ as well, and to rejoice in the simple fact of growth on the part of God's people in knowledge and virtue. But this is not enough. We feel it to be equally desirable to understand the law of spiritual action under which this gratifying change has been effected; we deem it equally important to discover the method adopted and the agencies employed by our Saviour for the advancement of His cause. For such knowledge will qualify us to enter into His plans, and coöperate in their fulfilment.

Now, after the Bible, Church History is called to the

office of furnishing this knowledge. It shows how interpretation, biblical theology, and Christian ethics, have come to be understood far better than in the second century, how devout men of each successive generation have entered into the labors of their predecessors, resuming and carrying forward the investigation of God's unchanging Word from the point where it had been left before, and how every step in advance, taken by the faithful, is nevertheless a step in return to the primitive, divinely authorized belief and constitution of the Church,—the stream never flowing higher than its fountain head.

For the Apostles, under the influence of a divine power, did not for the most part write or speak mechanically, but intelligently, appreciating better than we are yet able to do the import of their own language, and its bearing in each case upon other doctrines of their Master; and therefore it may be presumed, that no essential principles of Christian truth or ecclesiastical polity were neglected by them in teaching the Churches. The opinion, that various types or schools of belief,—as the Petrine, Pauline, Johannean,—were established by the Apostles in the regions where they severally labored, and that in the best of these schools, or in some later sample of the Church, regarded as a mixture of them all, we are to look for the ultimate and maturest form of Christianity, is neither authorized by the New Testament, nor supported by analogy, nor deducible by fair interpretation from the events of history. It is unreasonable to presume that parties and strifes were sown in the heart of primitive Christianity by inspired teachers. God does not thus introduce division and weakness into His own household. It is also an error to suppose the first Christians incompetent to receive the leading doctrines of our

faith, or unwilling to discharge the practical duties of it. They were bold, earnest, self-denying, and ready to follow Christ through evil as well as good report. In every thing which pertains to the constitution and government and ordinances of the Church, they were not a whit behind the very chiefest of their successors.

But in regard to the deeper truths of divine revelation and their manifold bearings upon each other and the spiritual life of mankind, the early Christians were but children. What the Apostles knew by virtue of a special gift, must be evolved from their writings by ages of study. One after another, men of powerful intellect and great experience must be raised up to search the Scriptures, bring to light, arrange, and apply their profounder truths, and then pour them by the agency of voice or pen into the bosom of Christian society,—there to spread and work, silently perhaps, but swiftly, from member to member, till the whole body feels their quickening energy, and the Church springs forward in her course of light. By a repetition of this process, alike honorable to the Word of God and the dignity of regenerated, individual man, as well as encouraging to personal effort and a sense of responsibility on the part of every disciple to his Master, has Christianity made all her progress in the world ; each succeeding laborer having the advantage of a higher starting-point than his predecessors, and of all the knowledge deposited by them in the common mind of Christendom, if not in books ; while yet nothing is accomplished without the working of intelligent, sanctifying faith upon the heart, and the strenuous exertions of single-handed zeal for the truth. In the army of believers Christ expects “ every man to do his duty.” And whenever there has appeared in this

army a true champion, wholly devoted to his King and cause, others have caught the spirit of Christian heroism, the standard of truth has been carried forward, and the Word has been fulfilled, that "one should chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight."

Were there ample time for the purpose, it would be suitable for me, in the next place, to indicate the polemical value of such a history. It would be well to portray the severe struggles which now engage or presently await the friends of Christ. It would be proper to notice, for example, the startling theories of inspiration and Church development lately inaugurated, the fierce audacity of disbelief, screaming out its challenge and defiance, the servile prostration of credulity kissing the great toe of a spiritual autocrat and clamoring for the restoration of expelled darkness, the weasel approaches of lithe Jesuitism and the shameless polygamy of Latter Day Saints. And then it would be desirable to show how the Providence of God, as explained by the story of His people, would teach us to encounter these foes of good, and how jet after jet of historic light, cast into the very centre of this dense, black cloud of impending evils, must reveal its nature and fortify us against its violence. For existing errors have their roots in the past. To understand their nature, we must trace their growth by the light of history. They are old in spirit and substance, even if new in name and form. Atheistic and pantheistic philosophies are veteran enemies to the doctrine of Christ, and in the course of their long hostility have put on numberless disguises for the purpose of undermining the faith of some. Formalism, skepticism and mysticism, are types of error represented in every age, from the time of our Saviour until the present hour. False theories of in-

spiration, subverting the Word of God, were broached before the days of Origen, and have vexed the faith of Christians until now. Scarcely had the second century closed, when the Montanists took their rise, professing to enjoy new revelations and to introduce the final reign of the Spirit. The heirs of their creed have reappeared continually, and still flourish among us. And the same strain of remark would apply to a multitude of current errors. Indeed, whatever hostile views the Church is now called to meet and overcome, are the result of conflicts reaching back to the first ages of Christianity, and cannot be comprehended without knowing the history of our holy religion. For the citadel of truth has been often assailed, and by all imaginable foes. Her walls have been tried at every point and by every species of weapon; by catapult and battering-ram, by haughty summons and treacherous ambuscade, by patient siege and desperate assault, by armies of Doubters and troops of Bloodymen; while the tactics of unbelief have been varied till invention itself is weary, and every fresh stratagem proves but the repetition of an ancient failure. Hence a faithful history of our religion, delineating her conflicts and her victories, will disclose the elements, whether of weakness or of strength, in those opinions which now check her prosperity, and will teach us how to withstand, confute and destroy them. For in almost every system of belief there are certain doctrines which may be brought into vital connection with human nature as it is, certain points which have a sort of magnetic sympathy with corresponding forces in the soul, and which constitute the real power of their respective systems. By directing attention to the rise and growth of religious opinions, Church History lays open to inspec-

tion these central and attractive points, and thus indicates both where and how theories, which are false and pernicious, must be assailed, in order to effect their final overthrow.

It would also be suitable for me further to show the value of such a history, as tending to foster a catholic, charitable spirit. Men of shining virtue have appeared in almost every division of nominal Christianity. However erroneous and hurtful a creed may be in the main, it will generally embrace a few principles of truth, and one or more of these principles may preoccupy the hearts of a small number of individuals, working there nearly alone, and transforming the moral nature. Hence Christian heroes have been associated with the worst perversions of our faith, and we are called to honor integrity of conscience where we shudder at errors of belief. Especially frequent are instances of this kind at the formation of a new sect. The founder himself is oftentimes a man of earnest character and purpose, but of narrow mind and erratic judgment. Dissatisfied with existing opinions as wrong or inert, and eager to accomplish suddenly the reformation of mankind, he gives himself up to some novel idea, without apprehending its deeper tendencies or foreseeing its necessary results, when made the nucleus of a logical system, developed by cooler heads and received by worse hearts than his own. Moreover, an infant society, struggling for existence in the face of opposition, and yet boldly announcing the grandest and most beneficent changes to be effected by its future expansion, offers many attractions to enthusiastic, noble spirits. It appeals to every romantic sentiment and feeling of which they are capable or proud. It presents to them an open field for the exercise of chivalric gener-

osity in defence of the weak, and makes them blind to imperfections which they would at once perceive in a different cause. History, therefore, in view of these and similar facts, teaches us to beware of the first and slightest deviation from truth, as infinitely perilous, and yet encourages us to look with charity upon some who wade unconsciously into the shoreless sea of untruth, till its waves break over their heads.

It would then be proper for me to insist upon the value of our supposed history, as contributing to breadth of mind and soundness of judgment upon religious questions in those who should peruse it. It would be well to show that this work would give to its readers a large prospect and view, including the whole of Christendom from the Apostolic age to the present time ; that it would place them on the mountain top for observation, and enable them to behold at a glance the main streams of nominal Christianity throughout their entire course, to perceive their principal windings, and the direction in which on the whole, they have moved, and to ascertain with certainty the precise points to which they are severally tending. Such a survey is the best safeguard against those rash conclusions which men are liable to make from current events, mistaking, not unfrequently, the feverish and fitful energy of a dying cause for the vigorous action of health.

And, lastly, it would be interesting to take note of the spiritual bearing and worth of this history. It would be in place to exhibit the influence of recorded example, the power which good men are known to wield after death, by the transmitted story of their faithfulness. For a true history of the Church will abound in the facts of Christian experience. It will often reveal the inward

discipline which leads on to holiness. It will lay open the heart of more than one disciple to our inspection, and depict the fiery seas of trial through which men like Augustine, Luther and Bunyan passed to the haven of rest. It will testify of the new birth, of overcoming faith, and of holy enterprise, and will beckon us to follow the radiant pathway of those, in every generation, who "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

But my discourse must be arrested midway, to relieve your patience. This rapid glance at long trains of cumulative argument must suffice. And may He in whom there is light and no darkness at all, dwell in our hearts, and lead us to a better knowledge of Himself by the word of revelation and by the history of His people.



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